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ABSTRACT

A sample of dropouts is surveyed to determine their reasons for dropping out of school and to assess the factors currently used by the Dade County (Florida) school system to identify at-risk students. Data from telephone surveys of a randomly-selected sample of 2,779 persons who dropped out of grades 7 through 12 during 1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89; and data from school surveys concerning 447 at-risk students and 421 regular students are analyzed. The results show that at-risk students, not dropouts, have the lowest academic achievement test scores and the lowest self-esteem of the three groups, possibly because the dropout's self-esteem increases in environments away from school that provide more positive life experiences. The most frequently cited reason for dropping out is lack of interest in school. Many students who dropped out display academic and social signs of being at-risk, but many do not meet the stereotype in that they are not academic failures and are not from low socioeconomic status families. The Student Assistance Profile, used for determining at-risk students in the school system, appears to be supported. However, it has flagged only 51.7% of the dropouts in the survey sample. It is noted that there will always be a substantial group of potential dropouts who are difficult to identify because they do not meet the traditional dropout profile. Statistical data are presented in 18 tables and four graphs. Three appendices provide the two survey instruments and two tables of statistical data. (SLD)

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Reasons for Dropping Out of School
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Reasons for Dropping Out of School and Assessment of Risk Factors: A Comparison of Dropouts, "At-Risk", and "Regular" Students

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June 1990

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is concerned with addressing two action steps contained in the DCPS District Strategic Plan 1988-1993. These action steps involve following a random sample of dropouts to determine their reasons for dropping out of school and to assess the factors currently used by the district to identify "at-risk" students. The importance of determining why students drop out of school and how to identify potential dropouts is highlighted by a districtwide longitudinal dropout rate of approximately 24 percent.

Most of the previous research on school dropouts has attempted to find the background characteristics or correlates underlying the decision to leave school early. This research has indicated that the decision to drop out of school is related to a variety of social and personal factors. These factors have included the student's background, achievement level, attitudes and behavior at school, abilities in basic skills, grade retention, self-esteem, intelligence, employment while attending school, and pregnancy. Some authors contend that research should be directed toward understanding the "institutional character" of schools and how this affects the potential dropout. It is essential, therefore, to understand how current school policies and practices may contribute to the decision to drop out.

The conceptual framework for the survey portion of this study was composed of three elements. These elements included: 1) student background characteristics; 2) school processes; and 3) consequences of dropping out. Survey items addressing these elements were generated following a review of the literature on "at-risk" students and school dropouts. Development of the survey instrument included an intensive review by several DCPS "stakeholder" groups. These groups included the District Dropout Advisory Council and staff from the Division of Dropout Prevention. Data concerning the three elements mentioned above was also collected directly from the district computer files in addition to those items contained on the survey.

Three groups of students were surveyed and included in the analysis in order to add meaning to the large volume of data which was collected. These groups included dropouts, "at-risk" students, and a comparison group of "regular" students. A sample of students who dropped out of grades 7 to 12 during 1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89 were surveyed during a ten minute telephone interview. "At-risk" students completed a survey during a small group session with the school's Occupational Placement Specialist, and "regular" students completed the survey in language arts classes.

"At-risk" students attending school in Dade County are identified by their inclusion on a Student Assistance Profile which lists students who fall into at least one of nine categories. These categories include: 1) a major exceptionality; 2) limited English proficiency; 3) 18 or more absences; 4) two or more years overage; 5) reading stanine less than four; 6) attended more than three schools; 7) three or more D and F grades; 8) suspended during the previous year; and 9) the number of matches on profile criteria.

An assessment concerning the appropriateness of these factors in the identification of "at-risk" students was also made in the present study. Factors included in the Student Assistance Profile were assessed by determining whether or not dropouts participating in the telephone interview

portion of the project appeared on the profile one year prior to or during the year they dropped out of school. If factors used on the profile are effective in predicting dropouts, one would expect that a high percentage of these students who had already dropped out of school would have appeared on the profile when they attended school. An examination of the factors typifying these "flagged" students was also performed to determine which factors characterized these students most.

Although a relatively small number of students were surveyed in the present study (i.e., 420 dropouts, 447 "at-risk" students, and 421 "regular" students), comparisons of demographic data indicate that the three samples were generally representative of the DCPS student populations from which they were drawn. Findings from the survey tend to substantiate previous research concerning personal/social characteristics of dropouts and reasons for leaving school. The dropouts interviewed in the present study were more likely than "at-risk" and "regular" students to have: 1) come from "broken homes" where they lived with only one parent; 2) parents who did not complete high school themselves; 3) a sibling who also dropped out of school; 4) worked while attending school in order to support their family; 5) participated in the free and reduced price lunch program; and 6) higher frequency of absenteeism and tardiness. The dropouts interviewed also had significantly lower academic achievement test scores when compared to the comparison group of "regular" students and also had a higher frequency of indoor and outdoor suspensions.

Findings from the present survey did not substantiate the claim that dropouts frequently have low self-esteem. The "at-risk" students surveyed had the lowest academic achievement test scores and also appeared to have the lowest self-esteem. Evidence was presented which indicates that self-esteem might even increase as dropouts leave school and enter environments that provide them with more positive life experiences. A number of the dropouts (19 percent) perceived that school staff wanted them to drop out. Dropouts may leave school for a different environment where they perceive a sense of belonging exists more than it does at school.

Although dropouts had a more negative perception of their schools than did "at-risk" and "regular" students, almost 60 percent of the dropouts interviewed felt their school was good and effective in helping them learn and achieve. Dropouts were, however, less likely to feel a sense of genuine caring at their schools which may inhibit the development of a social bond between themselves and their school. The lack of this bond has been discussed in the literature as a partial explanation for the large dropout rates seen throughout the country.

The most frequently cited reason for dropping out was a lack of interest in school. Contrary to expectation, approximately 16 percent of the dropouts reported their courses were too easy and another 60 percent were actually satisfied with their academic progress at the time they dropped out. These findings raise the issue of relevancy and the inability of some dropouts to draw a connection between what is being taught in class and their daily lives. All dropouts do not leave school because of poor academic performance or because of family problems, or a lack of social support. Apparently a considerable number of students leave school because it does not interest them, they are unable to find meaning in what is being taught, and they lack active engagement in school-related activities.

In conclusion, to some extent these findings confirm what other studies of dropouts have shown. Students who drop out of school display academic and social signs of being "at-risk." However, a considerable number of DCPS dropouts do not match the stereotype often associated with students who drop out of school. Some dropouts are not academic failures nor do they all come from low socio-economic status (SES) families. DCPS students drop out for a variety of reasons, some of which are under the control of the schools and others which are not.

It appears that a zero dropout rate is not a realistic goal for any school district since there is a small percentage of students who are apparently unable to benefit from staying in their present school situation after a certain point in their educational career. To remedy some of the problems faced by these dropouts and other potential dropouts, it appears that the schools must continue to work toward becoming the focal point of an integrated service delivery network to provide the vast services required by "at-risk" students and their families. The school environment also needs improvement in order to change the attitude of students toward school. Consideration should be given to providing teachers and administrators with inservice training to facilitate this improvement. Inservice could include, at a minimum, training in how to communicate with and relate to students identified as potential dropouts as well as improving not only the relevancy of course content but also the methods used to instruct students in order to make learning stimulating and fun. Intervention efforts directed toward the families of "at-risk" students are also needed to encourage a positive attitude toward and participation in their own child's education.

In terms of the Student Assistance Profile, it appears the factors used in the profile are supported by the research literature and represent important areas to examine when identifying "at-risk" students. The profile appears to identify "at-risk" students only slightly better than chance, however, since it "flagged" only 51.7 percent of the dropouts participating in the telephone interview phase of this research project. The profile may also identify more students as "at-risk" than is justified. However, this type of error is preferred to those which fail to identify "at-risk" students who have a real likelihood of dropping out but for some reason are not identified. Further study is needed to empirically verify the criterion or cutoff points used for each factor on the profile. This latter point appears particularly important when the factors of grade point average and absences are examined. Further investigation into including SES into the profile might also prove beneficial. It must be remembered, however, that there will always be a substantial group of students who do not fit the traditional dropout stereotype, and therefore, will always be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to identify as potential dropouts.

INTRODUCTION

It has been well documented that there is a lack of information on a national level concerning students who drop out of school. As noted in the Phi Delta Kappan Research Bulletin (April 1989), "Most school districts don't even know how many pupils drop out, much less why." To fill this void locally, Strategy 3; Action Step 12 was included in the DCPS District Strategic Plan 1988 - 1993. The objective of this action step was to design and implement a study to follow-up a random sample of dropouts to systematically determine their reasons for dropping out of school.

In addition, Strategy 3; Action Step 13 of the DCPS District Strategic Plan 1988-1993 had as its objective to conduct an empirical study of dropout data to assess the factors currently used to identify "at-risk" students. This objective was also addressed in the present research study.

The importance of determining why students drop out of school is highlighted locally by a brief examination of the district's dropout rates over the past few years. The district calculates dropout rates in two ways. First, annual cross-sectional dropout rates are calculated which provide the number of dropouts for a given year expressed as a percentage of the official fall membership of the same school year. The districtwide cross-sectional dropout rate for grades 9-12 was 8.4 percent in 1986-87, 9.6 percent in 1987-88, and 8.9 percent in 1988-89. On the average, approximately 6,700 students dropped out of grades 9-12 in each of the last three school years. Cross-sectional dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender are published annually in the Statistical Abstract which is prepared by the Department of Management Analysis.

The district also calculates a longitudinal dropout rate. Longitudinal rates provide information concerning a defined group of students or cohort which is followed over a period of time. A 24 percent dropout rate was calculated for a cohort of all DCPS eighth grade students followed from June 1984 to June 1989 (Wilbur 1990). It appears quite evident, therefore, that the magnitude of the dropout problem makes it important to determine why students are leaving school early.

Previous research has indicated that the decision to drop out of school is related to the student's background, achievement level, and attitudes toward and behavior at school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock 1986). The two background characteristics that have been shown to be most strongly related to dropping out are socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity. Students of lower socioeconomic status have been consistently shown to have higher dropout rates than high socioeconomic status students. Research has also indicated that dropout occurs more frequently among Hispanic students than among Black, Non-Hispanic students, and more often among Black, Non-Hispanic than White, Non-Hispanic students.

Low academic achievement, as indicated by low test scores and low grades, has also been consistently associated with high dropout rates (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock 1986). A number of studies have argued that dropouts have the same abilities as high school graduates who decide not to go on to

college. However, a number of studies have also concluded that abilities in the basic skills are the single best predictor of dropping out. These studies make the case that abilities, as measured by I.Q. and standardized tests of achievement, are of secondary importance to poor grades and grade promotion in predicting whether or not students will drop out.

In terms of attitudes, students who become dropouts have been shown to be dissatisfied with school and to have lower self-esteem. Student behaviors that have been found to be associated with dropouts include enrollment in a nonacademic (vocation or general) curriculum and problem behaviors such as delinquency and truancy. Other authors have focused on the role pregnancy and employment while attending school play in dropping out (Camp 1980 and Steinberg 1982).

Most of the previous research on school dropouts has attempted to find the background characteristics or correlates underlying the decision to leave school early. Whelage and Rutter (1986) contend this approach tends to attribute dropping out to a form of "social deviance" and factors which absolve the school from responsibility because schools do not have any control over factors such as SES or ethnicity. Rather, these authors encourage research directed toward understanding the "institutional character" of schools and how this affects the potential dropout. In the view of these authors, it is essential to understand how current school policies and practices contribute to the decision to leave school early.

The present study was undertaken to comply with Strategy 3; Action Steps 12 and 13 of the DCPS District Strategic Plan 1988-93. It was the goal of this project not only to determine the background characteristics of students who drop out of school but also to understand how school practices may exacerbate the dropout problem. An examination of the predictors currently used to identify "at-risk" students was also conducted.

METHODOLOGY

A. Instrument Design

In order to make comparisons, three groups of students were surveyed. These groups included dropouts, "at-risk" students, and a comparison group of "regular" students. Two surveys were developed: one for dropouts and the other for the two comparison groups. The dropout survey was administered during a telephone interview. "At-risk" students completed the survey during a small group session with the school's Occupational Placement Specialist, and "regular" students completed the survey in language arts classes.

Survey items were generated following a review of the literature on "at-risk" students and school dropouts. The conceptual framework for this survey research was taken from Natriello, Pallas, and McDill (1986). These authors suggested that research on student dropouts should include four elements. These elements include: 1) student characteristics; 2) school processes; 3) consequences of dropping out; and 4) dropout rates. The present study involves three of these four elements since dropout rates are already studied by the district on a regular basis.

Development of the survey instruments included an intensive review of the items by several DCPS "stakeholder" groups. These groups included the District Dropout Prevention Advisory Council and staff from the Division of Dropout Prevention. These groups provided feedback regarding survey content and their suggestions were incorporated into the final instrument.

The Dropout Telephone Interview Survey consisted of 37 items and was divided into four major areas. Table 1 contains a listing of these areas and the number of items contained in each. Items contained in the Student Background and Attitude Survey administered to the two comparison groups were identical to those administered to dropouts except items referring to the consequences of dropping out were excluded. Copies of the survey instruments are included in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Table 1

Survey Areas and Corresponding Items

Area	Items*	No. of Items
School Processes	1-12	12
Personal/Social Background Characteristics	13-18 20-23; 30-32 & 34-37	17
Reason(s) for Dropping Out	19	1
Personal/Social Consequences of Dropping Out	24-29 & 33	7

* Item numbers refer to those used on the Dropout Telephone Interview Survey. Items concerning Personal/Social Consequences for Dropping Out were not included in the Student Background and Attitude Survey administered to "at-risk" and "regular" students.

Several different response formats were used on the surveys. School process items used a five-point Likert scale representing letter grades of A, B, C, D, and F corresponding to descriptors "always," "usually," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." Several items were open-ended and required a narrative response rather than a rating, while others required "yes" or "no" responses.

Data concerning a number of variables were collected directly from the district computer files in addition to those items contained on the surveys. These variables included the school "at-risk" and "regular" students were presently attending or the last school, year, and grade dropouts last attended. If respondents had dropped out of more than one school they were told to respond to the survey questions based on the last or most recent school from which they had dropped out. Data for the following variables were also retrieved directly from the district's computer files for the three student groups: 1) family SES defined as student participation in the free or reduced lunch program; 2) number of days absent during the previous school year; 3) number of indoor or outdoor suspensions; 4) number of days students

arrived at school tardy during the previous school year; and 5) Stanford Achievement Test scores (Reading and Mathematics percentiles).

B. **Sample Selection**

A random sample of dropouts was drawn from a population of 21,642 students who dropped out of grades 7 to 12 during the past three years (i.e., 1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89). Table 2 provides a breakdown of this population by ethnicity and year.

Table 2

Dropout Population by Year and Ethnicity

Year	Ethnic Group									
	White Non-Hispanic		Black Non-Hispanic		Hispanic		Other		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1986-1987	1,597	25.7	1,957	31.5	2,617	42.1	49	0.8	6,219	28.7
1987-1988	1,744	25.3	2,174	31.5	2,927	42.4	53	0.8	6,898	31.9
1988-1989	1,741	20.4	3,036	35.6	3,695	43.3	53	0.6	8,525	39.4
Total	5,082	23.5	7,167	33.1	9,239	42.7	154	0.8	21,642	100.0

The state's definition of a dropout (Florida Statutes 228.041) was used to identify students who left school early. This definition is provided below.

> "A dropout is a student who, during a particular school year, is enrolled in school and leaves such school for any reason except death before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another public or private school or other educational institution."

The population of dropouts defined in this way was divided into 12 smaller groups by separating dropouts into four ethnic groups and the three school years studied. Six part-time interviewers were assigned a different group from which to conduct telephone interviews. The ethnic background of the interviewer was matched to that of the respondent whenever possible.

Initially, it was anticipated that approximately one-third of the 21,624 dropouts would have to be called in order to yield 400 completed telephone

interviews. However, the rate of completed interviews was considerably less than originally anticipated. Although students who drop out of school are typically difficult to contact by telephone, this population was particularly difficult to contact since it included students who had dropped out of school as long as three years ago. It took approximately 33 calls for each completed interview. A total of 14,486 out of the 21,624 or 67 percent of the students who dropped out of grades 7 to 12 during the past three years were called. More than 14,486 calls were actually made since hard to reach groups were phoned two or even three times to make every effort possible to initiate contact. Actual contact was made with 2,779 or 13 percent of the 21,624 students.

"At-risk" students attending school in Dade County are identified by their inclusion on a Student Assistance Profile which lists students who fall into at least one of nine categories. These categories include: 1) a major exceptionality; 2) limited English proficiency; 3) 18 or more absences the previous year; 4) two or more years older than the grade level average; 5) Stanford Reading stanine less than four; 6) attended three or more schools; 7) three or more D and F grades for the previous school year; 8) suspended during the previous school year; and 9) the number of matches on profile criteria.

The Occupational Placement Specialists at 47 middle and 25 senior high schools were asked to administer the Student Background and Attitude Survey to seven "at-risk" students appearing on the Student Assistance Profile at their school. This sampling design was expected to yield completed surveys from approximately 400 "at-risk" students.

Cluster sampling was used to select a group of "regular" students. An effort was made to eliminate all "at-risk" students from this group. Students enrolled in "middle" level language arts classes at 12 secondary schools were randomly selected to participate in this segment of the survey project. This sampling design was expected to yield completed surveys from approximately 400 "regular" students.

C. Interviewer Training

Each of the six interviewers who administered the Dropout Telephone Interview Survey participated in training before conducting any actual interviews. This training included instruction in interviewing techniques, orientation to the procedures involved with calling and recording survey responses, as well as practice with the survey instrument. All training was conducted by staff from the Department of Management Analysis.

Students from the Wolfson Campus of Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC) were hired as part-time telephone interviewers through the College Career Work Experience Program. Each interviewer was paid at the rate of $5.55 per hour for approximately 25 hours per week. A total of $5,300 was spent to cover these interviewing costs, of which approximately one-half was paid by each DCPS and M-DCC.

D. **Survey Implementation**

All telephone surveying was conducted from the offices of the Department of Management Analysis. To ensure appropriate representation of employed respondents, all interviewing was done between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. All surveying was conducted from August to November 1989. Ten percent of the interviews conducted by the M-DCC students were selected at random and validated by Management Analysis staff.

A bilingual (English and Spanish) interviewer telephoned Hispanic dropouts and generally conducted the interview in English but frequently spoke Spanish to get the dropout to the telephone.

Table 3 contains data concerning the disposition of all telephone calls initiated during this project. As with most telephone surveys the largest number of attempts resulted in "no answer." The relatively large proportion of "disconnected" and "wrong numbers" is also typical of telephone surveys with student dropout populations. Very few respondents refused to participate in the survey or failed to complete the survey once contact was made. In fact, many respondents discussed far more than was required by the survey instrument and took the opportunity to "vent" feelings. Students desiring information about returning to school were given the name and telephone number of staff working in the REPO Program, a dropout retrieval program.

Table 3

Disposition of Telephone Calls Placed During the Project

Disposition	Number	Percent
No Answer	4,968	34.3
Disconnected	2,427	16.7
Wrong Number	4,312	29.8
Refusals	55	0.4
Call Back Later	780	5.4
Not A Dropout	684	4.7
Completed Interview	439	3.0
Other	821	5.7
Total Attempts	14,486	100.0

In an effort to monitor the accuracy of the data maintained by the district, interviewers also noted students who claimed they did not drop out of school. Records were kept with regard to the reasons students provided to substantiate their claim.

The "at-risk" students were surveyed through a cooperative arrangement between the Office of Vocational, Adult, and Community Education and Department of Management Analysis. The assistance of DCPS middle and senior high school Occupational Placement Specialists was solicited via a memorandum signed by both departments (Appendix B). Occupational Placement Specialists at each school were instructed how to use a systematic sampling design to randomly select seven "at-risk" students from their rosters. They were instructed to administer the survey in a small group setting and to forward completed surveys to the Department of Management Analysis.

The sample of "regular" students consisted of a total of 36 classes, one class from each of six grades (grade 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) from each of the six DCPS regions. This design provided for one 7th grade class from each of the six regions, one 8th grade class from each region, etc. "Middle" level language arts classes were defined by the following course titles and numbers: 7th grade-Language Arts 2, 1001040; 8th grade-Language Arts 3, 1001070; 9th grade-English I, 1001310; 10th grade-English II, 1001340; 11th grade-English III, 1001370; and 12th grade-English IV, 1001400.

E. Design Used for Assessing Factors Included on the Student Assistance Profile

A commonly used definition of validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. In the case of the Student Assistance Profile, this definition refers to how accurately "at-risk" students are identified by the variables included on the profile.

The district has developed the Student Assistance Profile for the purpose of identifying students from grades 4-12, which uses the nine factors described in Table 4. At the beginning of each school year, the Office of Information Technology prints an updated Student Assistance Profile for each school. This report is sent to the principal at each school, and guidance personnel work with the students appearing on the profile.

The value of the Student Assistance Profile as a predictor of "at-risk" students can be measured in terms of the improvement in decisions which are made about students. In general, the district would like to have a high "batting average" when identifying "at-risk" students by including on the profile those students who are "at-risk" and not including those students who are not "at-risk." It is a situation of wanting to minimize false positive errors (e.g., identifying a student as "at-risk" who really is not) and false negative errors (e.g., failing to identify a student who is "at-risk").

This is a selection process which has fiscal implications since money is expended for students who appear on the profile. Participation in dropout prevention programs is determined by a student's inclusion on the profile. In order to expend money on those students who need it most, the district should be certain that the factors used in the profile do not include students who should not be identified as "at-risk." The opposite side of the selection process dictates that the district not withhold services to students who are "at-risk" by virtue of a procedure which fails to identify them as needing such services.

Table 4

Factors Included on the DCPS Student Assistance Profile

Factor	Criterion
Major Exceptionality	Appropriate exceptionality designation for each exceptional education student
Limited English Proficiency	Assigned to ESOL for five semesters or more (used on the profile since 1987-88)
Absenteeism	18 or more occurrences of absence in the previous school year (Fridays and Mondays count as two absences)
Age	Two or more years older than the grade level average
Achievement Scores	(Stanford) Reading stanine less than four
School Mobility	Attended three or more schools in the preceding year
Grade Point Average	Three or more D's or F's for the previous school year (not applicable to elementary school students)
Suspension	Total days of indoor or outdoor suspension in the previous school year
Severity	Number of matches on profile criteria

The ideal experimental design or "acid test" of this identification process would involve identifying students by the nine factors contained on the Student Assistance Profile but not conducting any intervention with the identified students. In this ideal experimental design, students would be followed for a period of time to determine whether they stayed in school and graduated or whether they dropped out. After a sufficient amount of time had passed, a count would be made of those students identified as "at-risk" by virtue of the Student Assistance Profile. Validity of the profile would be demonstrated if a large proportion of those students who were identified as "at-risk" did in fact drop out while a large proportion of the students not identified as "at-risk" did not drop out of school. This ideal predictive validity design is generally not possible because of the requirement to withhold treatment (i.e., participation in dropout prevention programs) to deserving students.

As an alternative to this ideal design, factors included in the profile were assessed by determining whether or not dropouts participating in the telephone

interview portion of the research project appeared on the Student Assistance Profile one year prior to or during the year they dropped out of school. If the factors used on the profile were effective in predicting dropouts, one would expect that a high percentage of those students who had already dropped out of school would have appeared on the profile when they attended school. An examination of the factors typifying these "flagged" students was also performed to determine which factors characterized these students most.

It should be noted that using an alternative to the ideal predictive validity design does not allow a definitive statement to be made about the efficacy of the predictive capabilities of the Student Assistance Profile. However, this design represents the district's first attempt to determine the validity of a selection device which has been in use for approximately five years but to date never empirically studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This portion of the report is divided into two major sections. The first provides data concerning the survey findings and includes discussions about sample demographics, accuracy of the dropout data maintained by the district, background characteristics, school processes, reasons for dropping out, and the consequences of dropping out. The second section reports findings concerning the assessment of factors used on the Student Assistance Profile.

A. Sample Demographic Characteristics

The degree of similarity between a sample and the demographics of the population from which the sample is selected indicates the extent to which findings can be generalized to the larger population. Although a relatively small number of students were surveyed in the present study, comparisons of demographic data indicate that the three survey samples were generally representative of DCPS dropouts, "at-risk", and "regular" students.

A total of 420 of the 439 dropout interviews were used in the final data analysis. Nineteen interview respondents were eliminated to yield as representative a group of dropouts as possible. Data contained in Table 5 indicate there was a difference in the grade distributions between the dropouts who were interviewed and included in the data analysis and the population of DCPS dropouts. Seventh and eighth grade dropouts were particularly difficult to contact by phone since they were the most mobile and unstable group as far as residence and telephone number were concerned. However, the congruence between the survey respondents included in the data analysis and the dropout population is consistent with what would be expected, given the statistical limitations inherent in the sample size (n=420).

Table 5

Dropout Sample Demographics Compared to DCPS Dropout Population

Demographic Variable	Survey Sample (n=420) %	Dropout Population (n=21,624) * %	Difference %
Ethnicity:			
White, Non-Hispanic	23.3	23.5	-0.2
Black, Non-Hispanic	33.1	33.1	0.0
Hispanic	42.6	42.7	-0.1
Other	1.0	0.7	+0.3
Gender:			
Male	59.8	58.3	+1.5
Female	40.2	41.7	-1.5

Table 5 (continued)

Dropout Sample Demographics Compared to DCPS Dropout Population

Demographic Variable	Survey Sample (n=420) %	Dropout Population (n=21,624) * %	Difference %
Grade:			
7th	4.1	11.2	-7.1
8th	8.1	13.9	-5.8
9th	16.4	22.9	-6.5
10th	29.0	21.0	+8.0
11th	26.9	17.2	+9.7
12th	15.5	13.8	+1.7
School Year:			
1988-89	39.3	39.4	-0.1
1987-88	32.6	31.9	+0.7
1986-87	28.1	28.7	-0.6

* Taken from district computer files for the last three years including 1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89.

Similar demographic comparisons for the other two groups indicate they are also representative of the student populations from which they were drawn. Tables comparing "at-risk" (n=447) and "regular" (n=421) student samples to those of corresponding DCPS student populations can be found in Appendix C.

B. **Accuracy of the Dropout File Data**

Data already discussed in Table 3 indicate that almost one-third of the phone numbers obtained directly from the district's dropout file were recorded by the interviewers as being wrong numbers. It should be noted, however, that some of these phone numbers were for students who had left school three years prior to conducting the follow-up study. Therefore, phone numbers contained on the district's file may have been accurate at the time the student attended school, but had changed since that time.

A total of 684, or approximately one-quarter of the 2,779 respondents, indicated they did not drop out of school. Most of these respondents indicated they had transferred to another school outside of Dade County. Other students who claimed they were not dropouts indicated they had transferred to a private school in the county or had obtained a GED diploma. A few of these respondents claimed they had graduated with their class and never left school for any reason. (These claims were not verified by examining DCPS computer records.) It must be noted that acknowledging one has dropped out of school is not a socially desirable characteristic. The fact that one out of four respondents claimed they did not drop out of school may have been due to an unwillingness to admit to being a school dropout.

It appears that the dropout data maintained by the district is reasonably accurate but that improvements could be made. The accurate use of appropriate withdrawal codes at the school-level should continue to be monitored. The tracking system should deal better with students who transfer to schools located in other counties, and for students who enroll in adult vocational programs, GED programs, and for those students who enroll in private schools in Dade County. These problems are not actually a function of the tracking system, but a feature of its implementation. These concerns will be addressed by the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN) once the system is fully operational.

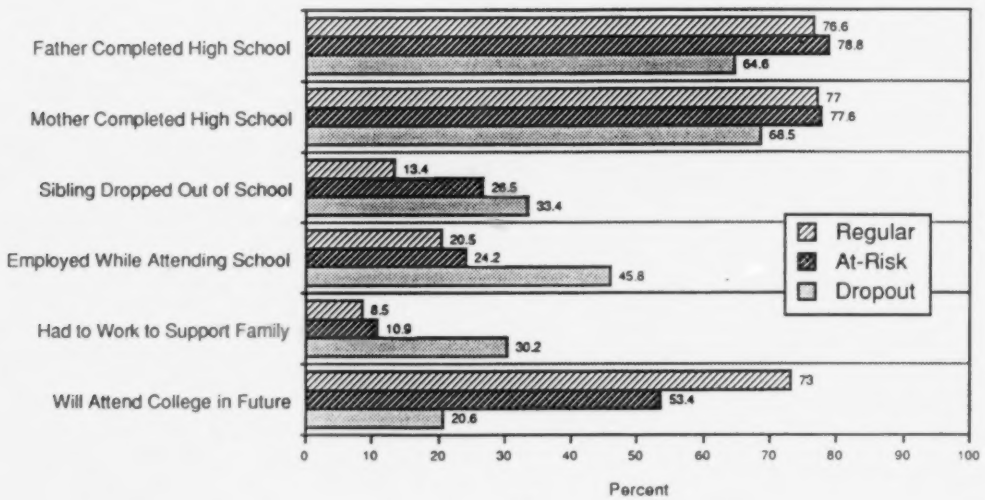
C. Background Characteristics of the Three Student Groups

Self-Reported Background Characteristics. Figure 1 and Table 6 show data concerning eleven self-reported background characteristics across the three groups of students. Findings from the present study tend to substantiate previous research which has found that some personal/social characteristics are more prevalent among students who drop out of school. Dropouts were more likely than either "regular" or "at-risk" students to have a sibling who also dropped out of school, to work while attending school in order to support their family, and to have parents who did not complete high school. Dropouts were less likely than either "regular" or "at-risk" students to have lived with both parents while attending school, to have parents who expected them to learn a lot in school, and to have plans to attend college in the future.

Findings from the present study substantiate previous research which indicates that school dropouts frequently come from "broken homes" where both parents are not present. Only 42 percent of the DCPS dropouts interviewed lived with both of their parents at the time they dropped out of school. Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts lived with both parents less frequently than either White, Non-Hispanic or Hispanic dropouts. Only 16.6 percent of the Black, non-Hispanic dropouts reported living with both parents during the year they dropped out of school compared to 50.5 percent for White, Non-Hispanic and 57.0 percent for the Hispanic dropouts.

Figure 1

Self-Reported Background Characteristics



Whether an adult is home when children arrive home after school is another familial variable which has been shown to be associated with students who drop out of school. Sixty-one percent of the dropouts reported that an adult was "always" or "usually" at home after school. However, approximately three out of ten dropouts reported there was "rarely" or "never" an adult at home after school. Only 18.0 percent of the "regular" students surveyed and 16.7 percent of "at-risk" students reported a similar "latch key" situation existing within their families.

Table 6

Self-Reported Background Characteristics

Characteristic	Student Group		
	"Regular" (n=421) %	"At-Risk" (n=447) %	Dropout (n=420) %
Father completed high school	76.6	78.8	64.6
Mother completed high school	77.0	77.6	68.5
Sibling dropped out of school	13.4	26.5	33.4
Lived with both parents when attending school	50.6	47.4	42.0
Language other than English spoken frequently at home	50.2	50.5	37.9
Adult always or usually home after school	56.7	61.0	60.8
Parents expected respondent to learn a lot in school	98.8	98.1	83.1
Employed while attending school	20.5	24.2	45.8
Had to work to support family	8.5	10.9	30.2
Attend or plan to attend college in the future	73.0	53.4	20.6
Do not have any future educational plans	0.0	0.2	4.6

Although 83.1 percent of the dropouts reported their parents expected them to "learn a lot in school" another 6.4 percent indicated they did not know whether their parents expected them to learn a lot or not in school. Nearly 100 percent of the other two groups of students indicated that their parents

expected them to learn a lot in school. Additionally, 72 percent of the dropouts reported their parents disagreed with their decision to drop out, however 5.8 percent of the dropouts reported their parents did not care that they dropped out of school. Apparently, Hispanic and Black, Non-Hispanic parents disagreed more with the decision to drop out of school than White, Non-Hispanic parents. Three-quarters of the Hispanic and Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts reported their parents disagreed with their decision to dropout compared with 63.9 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic dropouts.

Background Characteristics From District Computer Files. Table 7 contains results concerning an additional six background variables. These data were collected directly from the district's computer files. The SES factor defined by participation in the free or reduced lunch program indicates that dropouts (73.7 percent) were almost twice as likely to participate in this program when compared to "regular" (37.4 percent) and to "at-risk" (41.6 percent) students. Dropouts also tended to be absent and tardy more frequently than either of the other two comparison groups. In contrast, "at-risk" students tended to be suspended slightly more frequently than dropouts and as a group attained significantly lower achievement test scores when compared to dropouts and "regular" students. This difference among the groups was most dramatic for reading which is considered the single most important academic skill. "At-risk" students as a group were reading at the 21st percentile compared to the 48th percentile for "regular" students and 35th percentile for dropouts.

Table 7

SES and Academic Achievement Characteristics

Characteristic	Student Group		
	"Regular" (n=421)	"At-Risk" (n=447)	Dropout (n=420)
% Free or Reduced Lunch	37.4	41.6	73.7
Average Days Absent	7.5	17.5	27.6
Average Days Tardy	2.1	5.0	4.8
Average Days Suspended	0.2	3.6	3.2
Stanford Reading (Median Percentile)	48th	21st	35th
Stanford Math (Median Percentile)	65th	32nd	38th

Self-Esteem and School Involvement Among the Three Student Groups. Previous research has indicated that students who drop out of school have low self-esteem (Bachman, O'Malley, and Johnston, 1978; Combs and Cooley, 1968). Several items on the two surveys used in the present study addressed this

issue. Data contained in Table 8 do not substantiate this claim for the present sample. Although dropouts were less likely to perceive themselves as "good students" (86.9 percent) when compared to either "regular" (96.9 percent) and "at-risk" students (91.6 percent), they were less likely to perceive themselves as "troublemakers" (19.1 percent) when compared to either "regular" (28.6 percent) and "at-risk" students (41.1 percent). Dropouts also viewed themselves as "losers" less frequently (8.1 percent) when compared to either "regular" (11.3 percent) and "at-risk" students (19.9 percent). The "at-risk" group completing the surveys in this particular study appears to possess not only the lowest academic achievement test scores but they also expressed the least positive self-concept among the three student groups.

Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts tended to perceive themselves as "good students" (95.0 percent) more frequently than either White, Non-Hispanic (80.0 percent) or Hispanic (83.4 percent) dropouts. In addition, approximately one out of ten White, Non-Hispanic and Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts perceive themselves as "losers." Only 5.8 percent of Hispanic dropouts see themselves in such a manner.

These findings are supported by some of the more recent literature in the area which indicate that leaving school before graduation is less stigmatized, at least within students' immediate peer group, than it was in earlier years and dropouts' self-esteem may be affected less as a result (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock 1986). Wehlage and Rutter (1986) examined the change in average self-esteem from the sophomore year to the end of school two years later and actually found an increase in self-esteem for students who dropped out of school. Interestingly, these authors concluded that "The overall gain in self-esteem by dropouts is exactly the same as for the group with the greatest self-esteem, the college bound" (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986, p.387). Therefore, self-esteem may increase as dropouts leave school and enter environments that provide them with more positive life experiences.

Table 8

Self-Concept Ratings

"Other Students Think of Me as a..."	% Responding "Always" & "Sometimes"		
	"Regular" (n=421)	"At-Risk" (n=447)	Dropout (n=420)
Good Student	96.9	91.6	86.9
Troublemaker	28.6	41.4	19.1
Loser	11.3	19.9	8.1

Students' active participation in school and classroom activities tend to yield identification with school. As evidenced by responses to the survey, dropouts (33.9 percent) and "at-risk" students (39.3 percent) were less

involved with school clubs and/or teams when compared to "regular" students (55.0 percent). This is an important finding since students who identify with school and are involved with school-related activities have been shown to feel they belong in the school and tend to value success in school-related goals (Finn 1989).

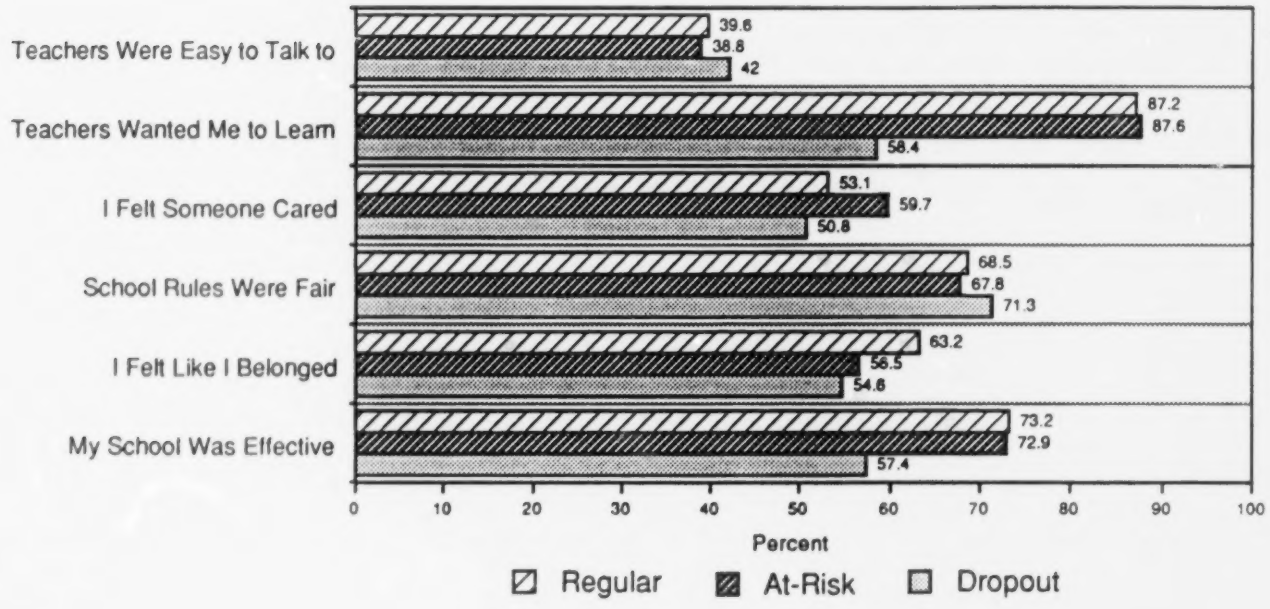
D. School Processes Related to Dropping Out

It may be more important to examine what goes on inside schools than it is to examine the characteristics of students who drop out. The idea that schools themselves may exacerbate the dropout problem has been discussed previously by Wehlage and Rutter (1986). These authors propose that research look for the causes of dropping out not only in the characteristics of the dropout, but also in relation to those institutional characteristics that affect the marginal student in a negative manner. Dropping out can be examined as a problem of school policies and practices rather than exclusively a problem within the student.

School Effectiveness Indicators. All three student groups were asked to evaluate or grade their schools on seven factors associated with the educational process as practiced at their schools. The proportion of A and B grades for each of these areas is presented in Figure 2 and Table 9. In general, dropouts provided ratings indicating less satisfaction with the last school they attended when compared to the ratings of "regular" and "at-risk" students. Although dropouts tended to provide the lowest ratings, over half (57.4 percent) rated their school as "good and effective in helping them learn and achieve."

Figure 2

School Process Ratings



All three student groups appeared least positive about the extent to which teachers are easy to talk to when students are having problems in class. Students provided the highest ratings concerning the degree to which teachers really wanted them to learn in their classes. The largest difference between dropouts and the two comparison groups also occurred when they were confronted with the issue of whether teachers really wanted them to learn. Over 87 percent of the "regular" and "at-risk" students felt their teachers encouraged them to learn compared to only 58.4 percent of the dropouts. Dropouts were also less likely to view school counselors as concerned and willing to help them with personal problems. Dropouts were also less likely to feel that someone at the school really cared.

Table 9

School Process Ratings

Area Rated	Percent A and B Grades		
	"Regular" (n=421)	"At-Risk" (n=447)	Dropout (n=420)
Teachers were easy to talk to when having a problem.	39.6	38.8	42.0
Teachers really wanted me to learn.	87.2	87.6	58.4
School counselors showed concern and tried to help with personal problems.	64.2	71.1	53.4
There was a general feeling at the school that someone cared.	53.1	59.7	50.8
Punishments for breaking school rules were the same for everyone.	68.5	67.8	71.3
I felt like I belonged at the school.	63.2	56.5	54.6
My school was good; it was effective in helping me learn and achieve.	73.2	72.9	57.4

As expected, the perceived school-related experiences for students who drop out appear different from those of students who remain in school. For example, the social bond between dropouts and their schools does not seem as strong as it does for the other two comparison groups. This is important considering its relationship to what Whelage (1988) has referred to as "school membership." The extent to which students actually feel they belong to a school as a member of that school has been found to be an important factor in reducing dropouts. School membership means students have established a social bond between themselves and the school. Development of this bond is promoted by positive and respectful relations between adults and students at the

school, as well as providing direct help to students with their personal problems. These data suggest that there is a problem with the holding power of schools for some students. Dropouts tend to have more negative school experiences and may leave school for a different environment where they perceive a sense of belonging may exist more than it does at school.

A comparison across White, Non-Hispanic, Black, Non-Hispanic, and Hispanic dropouts indicated that Black dropouts were considerably more positive about how they perceived their schools than either of the other two groups (Table 10). White, Non-Hispanic dropouts were least positive when asked to rate how effective their school was overall. Only 39.2 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic dropouts gave their schools A and B grades while 55.7 percent of the Hispanic and 73.5 percent of the Black dropouts provided A and B grades concerning the extent to which their schools were helpful in assisting them learn and achieve.

Table 10

Ethnic Comparison of School Process Ratings Among Dropouts

Area Rated	Percent A and B Grades		
	White Non-Hispanic (n=99)	Black Non-Hispanic (n=139)	Hispanic (n=179)
Teachers were easy to talk to when having a problem.	41.7	54.1	33.3
Teachers really wanted me to learn.	52.6	67.7	54.0
School counselors showed concern and tried to help with personal problems.	55.3	65.3	43.8
There was a general feeling at the school that someone cared.	45.4	66.2	41.4
Punishments for breaking school rules were the same for everyone.	67.9	76.6	62.3
I felt like I belonged at the school.	43.6	68.4	50.8
My school was good; it was effective in helping me learn and achieve.	39.2	73.5	55.7

Hispanic dropouts were less positive than the other two student groups concerning how receptive and approachable they perceived teachers to be when they were having problems in class. Thirty-three percent of Hispanic dropouts provided A and B grades in this area compared to 41.7 percent for White, Non-

Hispanic and 54.1 percent for Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts. In addition, Hispanic dropouts were also least satisfied with the school counselors' ability to help them with personal problems. Forty-four percent of Hispanic dropouts provided A and B grades to school counselors compared to 55.3 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic and 65.3 percent of the Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts.

"Push Out" Experiences Among Dropouts. An example of how schools may exacerbate the dropout problem is seen when school-level staff encourage students to leave school. This has been called "push out." The present study contains self-reported perceptions on the part of dropouts who felt as though school-level staff wanted them to leave. The perceptions as expressed by dropouts during the telephone interview ranged from being told directly to leave school to an assumption that someone at the school wanted them to leave.

A total of 80 or 19.0 percent of the dropouts interviewed indicated they thought someone at the school wanted them to drop out. These students identified teachers and assistant principals most frequently as the staff who wanted them to leave.

Forty percent of the 147 students who never returned to any type of educational activity after dropping out perceived that someone at their last school wanted them to leave. Hispanic students reported this perception slightly more (21.9 percent) than either White, Non-Hispanic (18.6 percent) and Black, Non-Hispanic (16.9 percent) dropouts.

The prevalence of this perception on the part of dropouts interviewed in the present study is disturbing since it may signal giving up on the part of some staff. This finding may support critics who contend that schools themselves place obstacles in front of students who may not fit the "narrow window" of accepted behavior and structure existing at some schools. It is difficult for students to establish a sense of school membership in an atmosphere that encourages them to leave.

This perception on the part of dropouts is not unique to DCPS. In a recent survey of dropouts from the Cincinnati Public Schools, Gastright (1989) reported that 22 percent of the dropouts felt they had been "invited to leave school." It appears that a zero dropout rate is not a realistic goal for any school district since there is a small percentage of students who are apparently unable to benefit from staying in their present school situation after a certain point in their educational career. Recognizing the existence of this possibility, a small proportion of school-level staff apparently encourage these students to leave.

Satisfaction with Course Offerings. Dropouts (80.9 percent) and "at-risk" students (78.2 percent) were less satisfied with the academic courses offered at their schools when compared to "regular" students (85.4 percent). Approximately one out of five dropouts indicated that the courses they took were not what they wanted. When given the opportunity to suggest the type of courses they would have wanted, they listed a vast range of academic offerings from automobile mechanics and shop classes to poetry and advanced mathematics. Although dropouts generally mentioned vocational/technical areas, work experience, and classes for everyday living such as personal finance, others wanted to take advanced courses in journalism, psychology, and computer

science. It could not be determined whether the dropouts were unaware that these courses are offered in the district or just not offered at their particular schools. A number of dropouts mentioned that the courses they really wanted to take were always closed because of over-enrollment. Still other dropouts indicated they were satisfied with the content areas offered at their schools, but courses should have been made more interesting for students.

Difficulty of Courses. Although three-quarters of the dropouts judged the difficulty level of their courses to be "just right," 15.7 percent thought their courses were "too easy" and only 6.7 percent felt they were "too hard." White, Non-Hispanic dropouts were twice as likely when compared to either Black, Non-Hispanic and Hispanic dropouts to judge their courses as "too easy." Ninety-two percent of "regular students" and 86.4 percent of the "at-risk" students judged the difficulty of their classes to be "just right." A smaller proportion of "regular" (3.6 percent) and "at-risk" (6.5 percent) students judged their classes to be "too easy" when compared to dropouts.

Effort Expended at School. Although half of the dropouts felt they put in "about the same" effort as other students, 34.8 percent indicated they "did not work as hard" while 8.4 percent felt they worked "harder." A larger proportion of "regular" (23.4 percent) and "at-risk" students (16.1 percent) felt they worked harder than other students when compared to dropouts.

Satisfaction with Progress in School. Contrary to expectation, only two out of five dropouts were dissatisfied with the progress they were making in school. In fact, 59.1 percent of the dropouts indicated they were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with the way they were doing in school at the time they dropped out. This compares to 71.7 percent of the "regular" students and 64.9 percent of the "at-risk" students who indicated they were satisfied with their academic progress in school.

Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts were considerably more satisfied with their performance in school than either White, Non-Hispanic or Hispanic dropouts. Seventy percent of Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts indicated they were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with how they were doing in school compared to 51.6 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic and 55.6 percent of the Hispanic dropouts.

E. Reasons for Dropping Out

A review of the principal reasons why students drop out of school may provide information for how additional resources can be allocated most effectively. Dropouts themselves are divided in their explanations of their problems, but one thing is clear: there is no single essential factor contributing to students leaving school early. Students report many reasons for dropping out. The single most common reason generally cited in the literature is poor academic performance. The literature also generally indicates that male dropouts report school and employment factors more often than females who cite marriage more often than their male counterparts.

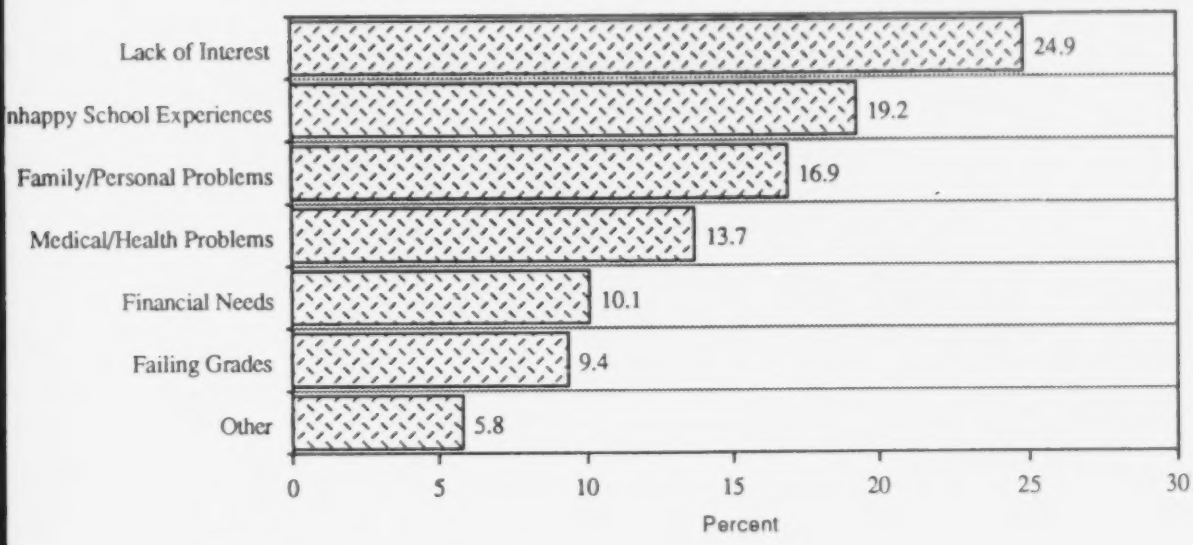
Top Three Reasons for Dropping Out. In the present study, the top three reasons given for dropping out of school included lack of interest, family/personal problems, and failing grades (Table 11). These three reasons

accounted for approximately one-half of all the reasons provided by the dropouts. When combining similar reasons to form seven categories as in Figure 3, failing grades decreased in importance while unhappy school experiences increased. Reasons combined to make up the unhappy school experience category in Figure 3 included "did not feel welcome," "someone at the school wanted me to leave," "dissatisfaction with teachers or principal," and "unhappy school experiences."

Although male and female dropouts reported a lack of interest in school and family/personal problems to the same extent, females report pregnancy and marriage whereas males report trouble with teachers and economic reasons more frequently (Table 12). Black, Non-Hispanic females reported pregnancy almost exclusively as their number one reason for dropping out. These findings essentially substantiate those from the dropout literature.

Figure 3

Reasons for Dropping Out of School



One-quarter of all reasons provided by dropouts focused on a lack of interest in school. Based on the perception of these students, schools were not providing stimulating learning activities which fostered interest and a sense of membership in the school environment. This is a disturbing finding.

Table 11

Reasons for Dropping Out of School

Reason for Dropping Out	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Lack of Interest	285	24.9
Family/Personal Problems	160	14.0
Failing Grades	107	9.4
Maternity/Pregnancy	99	8.6
Dissatisfaction With Teachers or Principal	95	8.3
Unhappy School Experience	78	6.8
Financial Needs	64	5.6
Working Took Too Much Time	51	4.5
Marriage	33	2.9
Medical/Health Problems	31	2.7
Drugs/Alcohol	27	2.4
Someone From the School Wanted Me to Leave	26	2.3
Problems With the Police	24	2.1
Did Not Feel Welcome	20	1.8
School Was Not Going to Help Me Get a Job	13	1.1
Join Armed Forces	2	0.2
Don't Know	28	2.4
Total	1,143	100.0

Note: Number of responses exceed the number of interviews since respondents were encouraged to provide more than one reason if others applied.

Table 12

A Gender Comparison of the Top Ten Reasons for Dropping Out

Main Reason	Percent Responding	
	Male	Female
Lack of Interest	25.3	24.4
Family/Personal Problems	15.1	14.0
Failing Grades	9.0	8.3
Maternity/Pregnancy	0.9	20.0
Dissatisfaction With Teachers or Principal	9.9	7.0
Unhappy School Experience	8.6	4.8
Financial Needs	7.7	3.1
Working Took Too Much Time	5.9	1.8
Marriage	1.2	5.2
Medical/Health Problems	2.5	4.4

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 since above table includes only 10 of the 18 reasons for dropping out of school.

Ethnic Comparison of the Reasons for Dropping Out. Table 13 contains data which provide a comparison among the three major ethnic groups concerning reasons for dropping out of school. Although a large proportion of the dropouts reported a lack of interest in school as their main reason for dropping out, it appeared that White, Non-Hispanic dropouts were the most indifferent toward school. Not only did White, Non-Hispanic students have the largest proportion of dropouts citing disinterest in school, but they also more frequently cited failing grades and unhappy school experiences among their major reasons for dropping out.

Apparently, a substantial number of dropouts wish to leave school and enter the world of work. Financial considerations appear to be more a problem for Hispanic as opposed to either White, Non-Hispanic or Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts. While 13.0 percent of the Hispanic dropouts reported dropping out because of financial needs or because they were working too many hours while attending school, only 7.7 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic and 7.2 percent of the Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts reported financial reasons for dropping out of school.

Table 13

An Ethnic Comparison of the Top Ten Reasons for Dropping Out

Reason for Dropping Out	White Non-Hispanic %	Black Non-Hispanic %	Hispanic %
Lack of Interest	28.4	23.8	25.9
Family/Personal Problems	19.0	16.1	12.6
Failing Grades	12.9	6.0	9.3
Maternity/Pregnancy	4.3	19.6	4.4
Dissatisfaction With Teachers or Principal	6.9	7.1	11.3
Unhappy School Experience	9.5	7.7	6.1
Financial Needs	3.4	5.4	7.3
Working Took Too Much Time	4.3	1.8	5.7
Marriage	1.7	1.2	4.9
Medical/Health Problems	3.4	5.4	2.0

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 since above table includes only 10 of the 18 reasons for dropping out of school.

Comparison of the Reasons for Dropping Out Among Students Who Returned and Those Who Did Not Return to School. Table 14 contains a comparison of the reasons for leaving school among dropouts who returned to school and those who did not. Although both groups of students gave disinterest in school and family/personal problems as the top two reasons for dropping out, students who dropped out but never returned tended to cite a lack of interest in school less and family/personal problems more than did those students who returned and graduated. It may be that disinterest can be overcome with time and maturation, but that family/personal problems may be a more enduring and important influence in keeping students away from school.

Table 14

Comparison of the Top Ten Reasons for Dropping Out
Among Respondents Who Returned to School and Those Who Did Not

Reason	Returned and Graduated (n=90) %	Returned Did Not Graduate (n=119) %	Did Not Return (n=144) %
Lack of Interest	29.8	26.4	20.2
Family/Personal Problems	10.4	13.2	17.6
Failing Grades	8.9	10.7	5.7
Maternity/Pregnancy	3.2	12.0	8.3
Dissatisfaction With Teachers or Principal	7.3	10.1	9.8
Unhappy School Experience	9.7	4.4	8.3
Financial Needs	5.6	4.4	7.2
Working Took Too Much Time	4.0	3.8	4.2
Marriage	2.4	2.5	4.7
Medical/Health Problems	5.6	4.4	2.1

Note: The number of students classified into the above categories does not equal 420 since a number of students responded "other" to the question used to classify them into one of the three groups. Percentages do not sum to 100 since above table includes only 10 of the 18 reasons for dropping out of school.

F. Personal and Socioeconomic Consequences of Dropping Out

Dropouts themselves generally feel that dropping out of school is a bad decision. In fact, 53.0 percent of the DCPS dropouts interviewed felt dropping out was a "bad decision" for them while another 29.4 percent felt it was the "only decision they could have made at the time." Only one out of ten dropouts perceived that dropping out of school was a "good decision." Hispanic dropouts regret their decision to leave school more than either White, Non-Hispanic and Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts. Sixty-one percent of Hispanic dropouts compared to 46.4 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic and 48.2 percent of the Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts reported that, in their opinion, dropping out of school was a "bad decision."

The proportion of students who regret dropping out of school in the present survey is somewhat less than that found by Gastright (1989). Seventy-nine percent of the dropouts interviewed in the Cincinnati Public Schools reported that if they had it to do over again they would not drop out of school. It is a distinct possibility that dropping out of school for some former students interviewed in the present study was perceived as a positive step.

Consequences for Future Educational and Employment Opportunities. Approximately one-third of the dropouts had not returned to any type of educational activity since dropping out (Table 15). A larger proportion of Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts (39.7 percent) had not been involved in any type of educational activity since dropping out when compared to White, Non-Hispanic (24.5 percent) and Hispanic (37.8 percent) dropouts. In addition, 27.9 percent of the dropouts had either been employed only sporadically or not at all since leaving school (Table 16). Again this type of work history was more characteristic of Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts (35.2 percent) than it was of White, Non-Hispanic (25.5 percent) or Hispanic (24.2 percent) dropouts.

Although there were dropouts who appeared to have a difficult time since leaving school, approximately half had returned to some form of education subsequent to dropping out. In fact, thirty-five percent of the dropouts claimed they had either returned to school and received a GED diploma or were currently working toward receiving their GED. Dropping out may be reversible for about one-half of the students who leave school early, since they do return to some form of education within 3 to 4 years after dropping out. This finding substantiates the High School and Beyond Study (Hahn 1987) which found that within four years 50 percent of sophomores who drop out ultimately return to school or enroll in GED classes.

Table 15

Involvement in Education After Dropping Out

Educational Activity	Number	Percent
Enrolled in DCPS at Time of Interview	29	7.0
Returned to DCPS and Graduated	13	3.1
Returned to DCPS but Did Not Graduate	13	3.1
Graduated From a Private High School	5	1.2
Returned to DCPS and Received GED Diploma	73	17.6
Returned to DCPS but Did Not Receive GED Diploma	73	17.6
No Involvement in Education Since Leaving DCPS	147	35.4

A total of 196 or 46.8 percent of the dropouts reported they were employed full-time at the time of the interview (Table 16). As a group, dropouts worked an average of 39.2 hours per week for an average hourly salary of $6.38. This self-reported hourly wage is considerably above the current minimum wage of $3.80. If these salary figures are accurate, it appears that a number of dropouts were earning a fairly competitive salary although not obtaining a high school diploma.

However, fewer Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts were employed at the time of the interview (40.3 percent) when compared to either White, Non-Hispanic (50.0 percent) and Hispanic (55.4 percent) dropouts. Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts reported earning lower average hourly salaries ($5.87) when compared to either White, Non-Hispanic ($7.55) and Hispanic ($6.07) dropouts. Therefore, the economic impact of dropping out of school for the dropouts interviewed in the present study appears more dramatic for Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts than it does for members of the other two major ethnic groups.

It is difficult to be successful in school when students must work almost full-time to help support their family due to economic necessity. A larger proportion of dropouts (30.2 percent) reported having to work to help support their families while attending school when compared to "regular" (8.5 percent) or "at-risk" (10.9 percent) students. In addition, dropouts who worked while attending school worked more hours a week than either of the other two groups. Dropouts averaged 34 hours per week while "regular" students worked approximately 23 hours per week and "at-risk" students approximately 25 hours.

A larger proportion of Hispanic dropouts were employed at the time they dropped out of school (54.9 percent) when compared to either White, Non-Hispanic (39.8 percent) and Black, Non-Hispanic (36.9 percent) dropouts. More Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts reported they needed to work while attending school in order to help support their family (39.9 percent) when compared to White, Non-Hispanic (18.4 percent) and Hispanic (28.4 percent) dropouts.

In general, it appears that many students leave school to take entry-level jobs that may offer only limited employment potential. Other research (Hahn, 1987) has indicated that employment prospects for dropouts are dismal. In part, this is because dropouts have unrealistic wage expectations or lack of information concerning job-search skills and requirements of entry-level employment. Unfortunately, their motivation to work is too strong for the schools to hold them.

Table 16

Employment Since Dropping Out of School

Employment Status	Number	Percent
Employed Full-Time (30 hours/week or more)	196	46.8
Employed Part-Time	51	12.2
Employed Off and On	68	16.2
Not Able To Find Work Since Dropping Out	49	11.7
Other	55	13.1

As expected, in terms of future educational plans, "regular" students aspire toward attending college more (73.0 percent) than either dropouts (19.0 percent) or "at-risk" students (53.4 percent). In addition, White, Non-Hispanic dropouts plan on attending college more (29.6 percent) than either Black, Non-Hispanic (6.7 percent) or Hispanic (21.34 percent) dropouts.

G. **Summary of Survey Findings:**

Findings from the present survey tend to substantiate previous research concerning personal/social characteristics of dropouts and the reasons given for leaving school. The dropouts interviewed in the present study were more likely than "at-risk" and "regular" students to have: 1) come from "broken homes" where they lived with only one parent; 2) parents who did not complete

high school themselves; 3) a sibling who also dropped out of school; 4) worked while attending school in order to support their family; 5) participated in the free and reduced lunch program; and 6) a higher frequency of absenteeism and tardiness. The dropouts interviewed in the present study also had significantly lower academic achievement test scores when compared to "regular" students and a higher frequency of indoor and outdoor suspensions.

Findings from the present survey did not substantiate the claim that dropouts frequently have low self-esteem. The "at-risk" students surveyed had the lowest academic achievement test scores and also appeared to have the lowest self-esteem. Evidence was presented which indicates that self-esteem might even increase as dropouts leave school and enter environments that provide them with more positive life experiences.

An interesting issue arises when considering why students with more severe academic achievement deficits and lower self-esteem, such as the "at-risk" students included in this study, are able to remain in school while students with less severe deficits in these two particular areas drop out. Other factors such as school process variables and their match with family background characteristics and the extent to which students are actively engaged in school probably explain this apparent discrepancy.

Although dropouts had a more negative perception of their schools than did "at-risk" and "regular" students, almost 60 percent of the dropouts interviewed felt their school was good and effective in helping them learn and achieve. Dropouts were, however, less likely to feel a sense of genuine caring at their schools, which may have inhibited the development of a social bond between themselves and their school. The lack of this bond has been discussed in the literature as a partial explanation for the large dropout rates seen throughout the country.

The perception on the part of some dropouts that school-level staff wanted them to leave school may be considered an illustration of this lack of social bonding between dropouts and their schools. A number (19 percent) of the students indicated they felt school staff wanted them to leave. Dropouts may leave school for a different environment where they perceive a sense of belonging exists more than it does at school.

The most frequently cited reason for dropping out was a lack of interest in school. In addition, contrary to expectation, approximately 16 percent of the dropouts reported their courses were too easy and another 60 percent were actually satisfied with their academic progress at the time they dropped out. These findings raise the issue of relevancy and the inability of some dropouts to draw a connection between what is being taught in class and their daily lives. All dropouts do not leave school because of poor academic performance or because of family problems, or a lack of social support. Apparently a considerable number of students leave school because it does not interest them, they are unable to find meaning in what is being taught, and they lack active engagement in school-related activities.

In conclusion, to some extent these findings confirm what other studies of dropouts have shown. Students who drop out of school display academic and social signs of being "at-risk." However, a considerable number of DCPS dropouts do not match the stereotype often attributed to students who drop out of school. Some dropouts are not academic failures, nor do they all come from low SES families. DCPS students drop out for a variety of reasons, some of which are under the control of the schools and others of which are not.

To remedy some of these problems, it appears that the schools must continue to work toward becoming the focal point of an integrated service delivery network to provide the vast services required by "at-risk" students and their families. The school environment also needs improvement in order to change the attitude of students toward school. Consideration should be given to providing teachers and administrators with inservice training to facilitate this improvement. Inservice could include, at a minimum, training in how to communicate with and relate to students identified as potential dropouts, as well as improving not only the relevancy of course content but also the methods used to instruct students in order to make learning stimulating and fun. Intervention efforts directed toward the families of "at-risk" students are also needed to encourage a positive attitude toward, and participation in, their own child's education.

H. Assessment of Risk Factors

If the Student Assistance Profile is effective in identifying potential dropouts then a relatively large number of those dropouts included in the interview sample should have appeared on the profile the year before or during the year they dropped out. Of the 302 students who dropped out of school in 1987-88 or 1988-89 and participated in the telephone interview, 156 or 51.7 percent appeared on the Student Assistance Profile (Table 17). A slightly better "hit rate" was experienced in 1988-89 since 91 out of the 165 dropouts or 55.2 percent of the dropouts appeared on the profile. The "hit rate" for dropouts who participated in the survey interview and left school in 1987-88 was slightly lower. A total of 65 out of 137, or 47.4 percent, of these dropouts were identified on the profile either one year before or during the year they dropped out. The profile identified Black, Non-Hispanic dropouts better than it identified White, Non-Hispanic dropouts. Fifty-seven percent of the former and 46.1 percent of the latter were identified by the profile.

Table 17

*

Interviewed Dropouts
Identified by the Student Assistance Profile

White Non-Hispanic		Black Non-Hispanic		Hispanic		Other		Total	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
35	46.1	56	57.1	65	51.6	0	0.0	156	51.7

* Includes students who were interviewed and dropped out from two of the three years under study since the districtwide Student Assistance Profile for 1985-86 required to analyze dropouts from 1986-87 was not available.

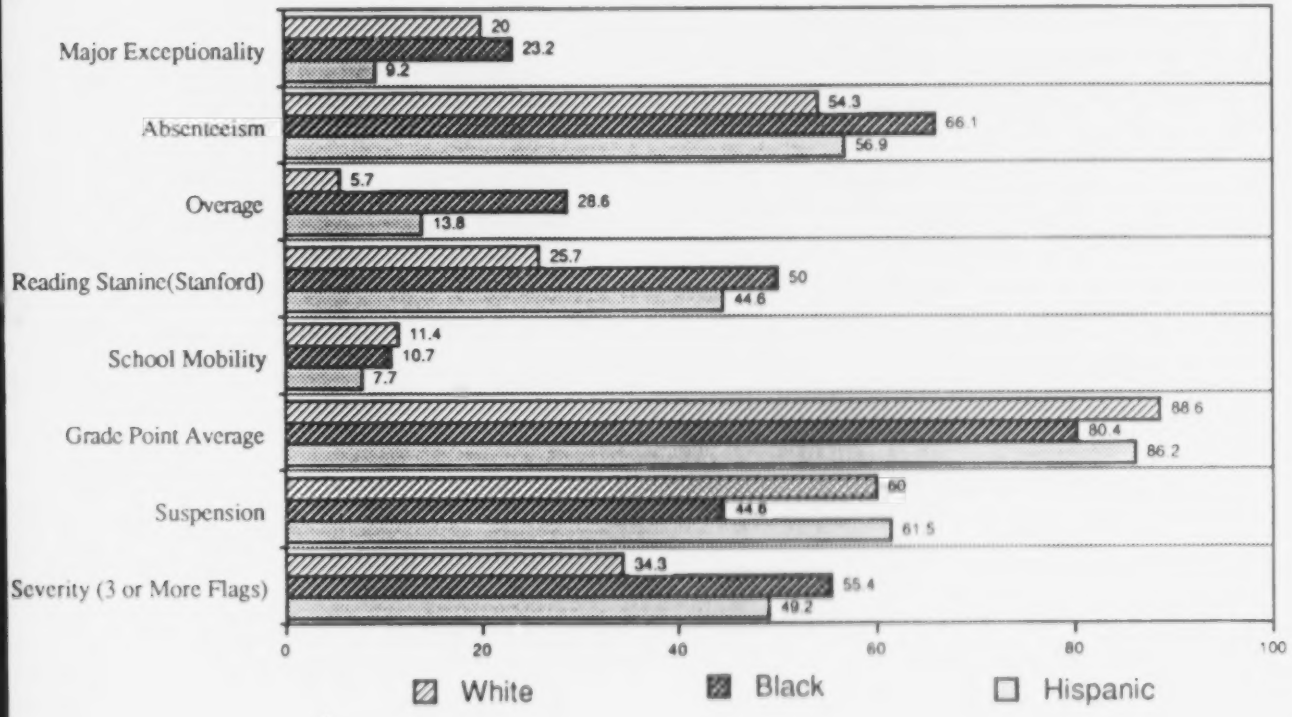
Characteristics of Dropouts as Identified by the Profile. Figure 4 and Table 18 provide data concerning the characteristics of the dropouts who were identified by the profile. The reader is referred to Table 4 on page 8 for a description of each factor. The three factors typifying these dropouts most were grade point average, absences, and suspensions. While 84.6 percent of the dropouts were identified by the profile because of receiving three or more D's or F's, 59.6 percent were identified due to 18 or more absences, and 55.1 percent had been suspended the previous year. Poor academic performance, as evidenced by D and F grades, was slightly more characteristic of White, Non-Hispanic students (88.6 percent) than it was of Black, Non-Hispanic (80.4 percent) and Hispanic (86.2 percent) dropouts.

Approximately 42 percent of the dropouts were "flagged" because of a Stanford Reading stanine less than four. This factor was more characteristic of Black, Non-Hispanic (50.0 percent) and Hispanic (44.6 percent) dropouts than it was

of White, Non-Hispanic dropouts (25.7 percent). Black, Non-Hispanic students achieved the highest overall severity ratings indicating they were characterized by more of the factors included on the profile than either of the other two ethnic groups. Approximately 55 percent of the Black, Non-Hispanic students achieved a severity rating of 3 or higher compared to 34.3 percent of the White, Non-Hispanic and 49.2 percent of the Hispanic dropouts.

Figure 4

Proportion of (Interviewed) Dropouts Flagged by Each Profile Factor



Although the limited English proficiency indicator was used in 1988-89, none of the dropouts participating in the telephone interview were identified under this category. In addition, relatively few dropouts (9.6 percent) were "flagged" on the school mobility factor indicating they had not changed schools frequently the prior school year.

Table 18

Frequency of Dropouts "Flagged"
Across the Nine Profile Indicators

Profile Factor	Percent "Flagged" by Factor			
	White Non-Hispanic (n=35) %	Black Non-Hispanic (n=56) %	Hispanic (n=65) %	Total (n=156) %
Major Exceptionality	20.0	23.2	9.2	16.7
Limited English Proficiency	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Absence	54.3	66.1	56.9	59.6
Age	5.7	28.6	13.8	17.3
Reading Stanine (Stanford)	25.7	50.0	44.6	42.3
School Mobility	11.4	10.7	7.7	9.6
Grade Point Average	88.6	80.4	86.2	84.6
Suspensions	60.0	44.6	61.5	55.1
Severity (3 or more "flags")	34.3	55.4	49.2	48.1

Comparison of Dropouts Identified and Those Not Identified by the Profile. An analysis of the differences between (interviewed) dropouts identified "at-risk" by the profile and those not identified as such indicated that, as expected dropouts identified "at-risk" had higher absenteeism and tardy rates as well as higher suspension rates, and lower Stanford Achievement Test scores. In general, they were more easily characterized by the "at-risk" factors included on the profile. Dropouts not identified by the profile were not readily characterized by these traditional indicators of "at-riskness." For example, over one-third of the dropouts not identified as "at-risk" scored above the 50th percentile on Stanford Reading while almost 45 percent scored at the same level on the Stanford Mathematics subtest.

An examination of reasons for dropping out showed that of the dropouts indicating they left school because of family/personal problems, 60 percent were identified by the profile while 40 percent were not. In addition, of those students reporting they left school because of unhappy school experiences, 62 percent were identified by the profile while 38 percent were not. It appears that although these factors are not included on the profile they may have impact on the school-related variables which are included.

Implication of the Findings. Approximately 40 percent of the students in grades 7 through 12 (48,361 out of 121,312) were identified as "at-risk" districtwide by the Student Assistance Profile during the 1989-90 school year. This appears to be a very large number of students. This relatively high proportion of "at-risk" students compares favorably, however, to the 38 percent "at-risk" population of 7 to 12 grade students identified using similar criteria in the Dallas Independent School District (Taite 1990).

Since 40 percent of the students in grades 7 to 12 were identified as "at-risk" during 1989-90 and only 52 percent of the (interviewed) dropouts from 1987-88 and 1988-89 were designated "at-risk", the criteria used in the Student Assistance Profile were only slightly more sucessful in identifying (interviewed) dropouts than if the "at-risk" group had been selected at random. To conclude that the Student Assistance Profile was successful in its present configuration, more than half of the dropouts should have been identified.

The success of the profile is not only a function of the factors used to identify "at-risk" students, but is also related to the cutoff scores or criteria used to "flag" students on each factor. The possibility exists that the cutoffs for several factors may contribute to misidentifying students. For example, the GPA criterion of 3 or more D's or F's refers to an absolute number of "poor" grades rather than to an average of all grades for the previous school year. A student may have three or more poor grades but might also have a considerable number of "good" grades such as A's and B's that would yield an acceptable grade point average but would earn a label of "at-risk" on the present profile. Grade point average is generally regarded as the summary measure of academic performance rather than the frequency of particular grades.

Findings from a recent study conducted in the Dallas Independent School District (Taite 1990) concluded that failing cumulative grade point average was the single most predictive factor in identifying "at-risk" students with "over age," and "course failure" constituting the second and third best predictors.

The cutoff of 18 days for the profile factor concerning absenteeism may also be somewhat low and may be responsible for labeling more students "at-risk" than is actually justified. Dropouts interviewed in the present study averaged approximately 28 days absent, almost 50 percent higher than allowed by the present profile. The average for dropouts participating in the interview phase of this study also underestimates absenteeism since it does not count Mondays and Fridays as two absences as in the profile. In addition, ten percent of the "regular" students surveyed had at least 15 days absent during the prior school year. These students stand a very good chance of being identified as "at-risk" given the present criterion.

These data are supported by Gastright (1989) who found an average of 59 days absent in a sample of school dropouts compared to a systemwide average of 18 days absent in the Cincinnati Ohio School District. A solution worth further investigation might also be to distinquish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. At present, this information is not recorded in the computer system and, therefore, not included in the profile.

Student SES is not currently used to identify "at-risk" students in Dade County. However, this factor has been repeatedly shown in the literature to be associated with "at-risk" students. In the present study, participation in the free or reduced lunch program differentiated "regular" from "at-risk" students and dropouts. Approximately 73 percent of the dropouts had received free or reduced lunches while attending school compared to 37 percent for "regular" and 42 percent for "at-risk" students. Consideration should be given, therefore, to using this factor in the identification of "at-risk" students.

In conclusion, it appears the factors used in the Student Assistance Profile are supported by the research literature and represent important areas to examine when identifying "at-risk" students. The profile appears to identify "at-risk" students only slightly better than chance, however, since it "flagged" only half of the dropouts participating in the telephone interview phase of this research project. The profile may also identify more students as "at-risk" than is justified (e.g., commits false positive errors), however this type of error is preferred to those which fail to identify "at-risk" students who have a real likelihood of dropping out but for some reason are not identified. Further study is needed to empirically verify the criterion or cutoff points used for each factor on the profile. This latter point appears particularly important when the factors of grade point average and absences are examined. Further investigation into including SES in the profile might also prove beneficial.

To maximize the proportion of correct decisions (e.g., whether to label a student "at-risk" or not) and minimize decision errors, a cutoff score or criterion should differentially weight the number of false positive errors and false negative errors. In selecting "at-risk" students for purposes of enrolling them in intervention programs, it appears more costly to the community to fail to identify for purposes of intervention a student who eventually leaves school early as opposed to identifying a student as "at-risk" who may never drop out. This idea should also be taken into account in the future when examining the criteria for the factors contained on the Student Assistance Profile.

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APPENDIX A

SCHOOL RATED _____

TELEPHONE SURVEY

Hello. Can I speak to _____ (name of dropout)? (IF NO, ARRANGE CALL-BACK.)

_____ Call Back _____ Date _____ Time

I) My name is _____. I'm calling on behalf of Dade County Public Schools. Our records show that you dropped out of _____ _____ (name of school). Is that right?

_____ Yes _____ No

INT: IF YES: GO TO SECTION II.

IF NO: Did you drop out of school? _____ Yes _____ No

IF YES: What school did you drop out of?

_____

(RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM & GO TO SECTION II.)

IF NO: EXPLAIN _____

_____

AND END INTERVIEW: "Thank you very much for your time. That's all the information we need."

II) The school system would like to see as many students as possible graduate. With your help, we can find out how Dade County Public Schools can improve and make it easier for students to stay in school. We want to help you and students like you. If you'd allow me, I'd like to ask you some questions about _____ (name of school). Your answers will be kept strictly confidential.

(INT: IF RESPONDENT HAS RE-ENTERED SCHOOL, HAVE RESPONDENT RATE SCHOOL THEY DROPPED OUT FROM.)

To start out, I'd like to ask you some questions about _____ (name of school). I'll ask you to tell me if each of the following sentences are true about the school "always," "usually," "sometimes," "rarely," or "never." OK, let's get started.

(INT: QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 7: READ LIST OF RESPONSES AFTER EACH STATEMENT.)

1. It was easy to talk to my teachers if I was having a problem in class.

_____ Always	_____ Rarely
_____ Usually	_____ Never
_____ Sometimes	_____ Don't Know

2. My teachers really wanted me to learn in their classes.

_____ Always	_____ Rarely
_____ Usually	_____ Never
_____ Sometimes	_____ Don't Know

3. School counselors were concerned about me and tried to help me with personal problems.

_____ Always	_____ Rarely
_____ Usually	_____ Never
_____ Sometimes	_____ Don't Know

4. I felt there was a general feeling at the school that someone cared.

_____ Always	_____ Rarely
_____ Usually	_____ Never
_____ Sometimes	_____ Don't Know

5. The punishments for breaking school rules were the same for everyone.

_____ Always	_____ Rarely
_____ Usually	_____ Never
_____ Sometimes	_____ Don't Know

6. I felt like I belonged at the school.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

7. In general, my school was good; it was effective in helping me learn and achieve.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

Now, I want to ask you some different questions about the school you dropped out of.

8. Do you think anyone from the school wanted you to drop out?

_____ Yes _____ No

(INT: IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 8 IS YES, GO TO QUESTION 9.
IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 8 IS NO, GO TO QUESTION 10.)

9. Was this person a:
(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES)

_____ Teacher _____ Counselor _____ Principal

_____ Assistant Principal _____ Someone Else _____
(explain)

10. Try to remember the one single thing that might have stopped you from leaving school early. If you could change any ONE thing about the school, what would it be?

(INT: RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM)

_____

_____

11. Were the courses offered at the school what you wanted to take?

_____ Yes _____ No

INT: IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 11 IS YES, GO TO QUESTION 12.

IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 11 IS NO, ASK:

What type of courses did you want to take that were not offered at the school? (INT: RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM)

_____

_____

12. Were the classes you took in school:

(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES)

_____ Too hard _____ Just about right _____ Too easy

Now, try to imagine how other students in your school might have thought about you. For each of the following sentences, tell me if other students might have thought about you in this way: Please answer " always," " sometimes," or "never."

Did other students think of you...

13. as a good student.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

14. as a troublemaker.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

15. as a loser.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

Next, I would like to ask you some questions about your activities while you were in school. (INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES FOR QUESTIONS 16 THROUGH 18.)

16. Were you involved in any school clubs or teams?

_____ Yes _____ No

17. Compared to other students, how hard did you work in school?

_____ Harder _____ About the Same _____ Not as Hard

18. How satisfied were you with the way you were doing in school?

_____ Very Satisfied _____ Somewhat Dissatisfied

_____ Somewhat Satisfied _____ Very Dissatisfied

19. Why did you drop out of school?

(INT: OPEN ENDED QUESTION. MARK "X"s NEXT TO THE CATEGORIES OF RESPONSES THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

A. _____ Lack of interest
B. _____ Failing grades
C. _____ Dissatisfaction with teachers or principal
D. _____ Unhappy school experience
E. _____ Financial needs
F. _____ Medical/health problems
G. _____ Marriage
H. _____ Maternity (pregnancy)
I. _____ Armed Forces
J. _____ Did not feel welcome
K. _____ Family/personal reasons
L. _____ School wasn't going to help me get a job
M. _____ Working took too much time
N. _____ Drugs/Alcohol
O. _____ Problems with the police
P. _____ Someone from the school wanted me to leave
Q. _____ Don't know
R. _____ Other (explain) _____

INT: IF RESPONDENT GAVE MORE THAN ONE REASON ASK:

What was your MAIN reason for dropping out of school? _____

(WRITE IN LETTER CORRESPONDING TO RESPONSE OPTION FROM QUESTION 19.)

INT: IF RESPONDENT GAVE ONLY ONE REASON ASK:

Were there any other reasons? _____

(WRITE IN LETTER CORRESPONDING TO RESPONSE OPTION FROM QUESTION 19.)

20. Who did you live with during the year you dropped out of school?

(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES.)

_____ both of your parents _____ your mother

_____ your father _____ someone else _____
(explain)

21. Was there an adult at home when you got home from school?

(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES)

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

_____ Usually _____ Rarely

22. How did your _____ (INT: INSERT QUESTION 20 RESPONSE) feel about your decision to drop out?

(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES)

_____ Agreed with my decision _____ Didn't Care

_____ Disagreed with my decision _____ Other _____
(explain)

23. Did _____ (INT: INSERT QUESTION 20 RESPONSE) expect you to learn a lot in school?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Don't Know

Now, I want to ask you a few questions about what you have been doing since you left school.

24. What do you currently think about your decision to leave school early?

(INT: READ LIST OF RESPONSES.)

_____ It was a good decision

_____ It was a bad decision

_____ It was the only decision I could have made at the time

_____ Other (explain) _____

25. What have you done concerning education since you left school?

(INT: OPEN ENDED QUESTION. MARK AN "X" NEXT TO THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

_____ I am currently enrolled in a Dade County Public School in grades K through 12 once again.

_____ I returned to a Dade County Public School and graduated.

_____ I returned to a Dade County Public School but left again without graduating.

_____ I attend(ed) a private school but didn't graduate.

_____ I graduated from a private school.

_____ Nothing, I have not attended another school since leaving Dade County Public Schools.

_____ I returned to an Adult Center and received a GED diploma.

_____ I returned to an Adult Center but didn't receive a GED diploma.

_____ Other (explain) _____

26. What have you done concerning employment since you left school?

(INT: OPEN ENDED QUESTION. MARK AN "X" NEXT TO THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

_____ I have been working full-time (30 or more hours per week).

_____ I have been working part-time.

_____ I have been employed off and on.

_____ I have not been able to find a job since leaving school.

_____ Other (explain) _____

27. Are you currently employed?

_____ Yes _____ No

(INT: IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 27 IS YES, GO TO QUESTION 28
IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 27 IS NO, GO TO QUESTION 30.)

28. How many hours per week do you work?

(INT: RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM) _____

29. What is your salary?

(INT: OPEN ENDED QUESTION. A RESPONSE TO ONLY ONE CATEGORY IS NECESSARY. RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM.)

$ _____ Hourly or $ _____ Weekly or

$ _____ Monthly or $ _____ Annually

30. Did you have a job at the time you dropped out of school?

_____ Yes _____ No

(INT: IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 30 IS YES, GO TO QUESTION 31.
IF RESPONSE TO QUESTION 30 IS NO, GO TO QUESTION 33.)

31. Did you have to work to help support your family?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Don't Know

32. How many hours per week were you working?

(INT: RECORD RESPONSE VERBATIM) _____

33. What are your future educational plans?

(INT: OPEN ENDED QUESTION. MARK AN "X" NEXT TO THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

_____ None

_____ Will return to school some day

_____ Will enroll in a vocational or training school

_____ Will take the high school diploma equivalency exam

_____ Will attend college some day

_____ Don't Know

_____ Other (explain) _____

Finally, I'd like to ask you just a few more questions about yourself.

34. Did any of your brothers or sisters leave school before graduating?

_____ Yes _____ No

35. How far did your father go in school?

(INT: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. MARK AN "X" NEXT TO THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

_____ 8th grade or less

_____ Some high school

_____ Finished high school

_____ Trade or business school

_____ Some college

_____ Graduated college

36. How far did your mother go in school?

(INT: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. MARK AN "X" NEXT TO THE CATEGORY OF RESPONSE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS.)

_____ 8th grade or less

_____ Some high school

_____ Finished high school

_____ Trade or business school

_____ Some college

_____ Graduated college

37. What is the language most frequently spoken in your home?

_____ English _____ Spanish _____ Other

This concludes our survey. Thank you for your help. If you want to find out how to get back into school or if you have a question about a Dade County Public Schools program, you can call Mr. Matthew Bannamon at 305-995-7333.

APPENDIX B

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DIVISION OF PLANNING, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
STUDENT BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

Name of Student _____

Student ID Number __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

School Name _____

School Location No. __ __ __ __

---

* * * *

4. I feel there is a general feeling at this school that someone cares.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

5. The punishments for breaking school rules are the same for everyone.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

6. I feel like I belong at this school.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

7. In general, my school is good; it is effective in helping me learn and achieve.

_____ Always _____ Rarely

_____ Usually _____ Never

_____ Sometimes _____ Don't Know

8. If you could change any ONE thing about this school, what would it be?

_____

_____

_____

DCA Auth;Exp.Jan.31, 1990

9. Are the courses offered at this school what you want to take?

_____ Yes _____ No

If no, what type of courses do you want to take that are not offered at this school?

_____

_____

10. Are the classes you are taking in school:

_____ Too hard _____ Just about right _____ Too easy

Try to imagine how other students in your school might think about you. Do other students think of you.....

11. as a good student.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

12. as a troublemaker.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

13. as a loser.

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

14. Are you involved in any school clubs or teams?

_____ Yes _____ No

15. Compared to other students, how hard do you work in school?

_____ Harder _____ About the Same _____ Not as Hard

16. How satisfied are you with the way you are doing school?

_____ Very Satisfied _____ Somewhat Dissatisfied

_____ Somewhat Satisfied _____ Very Dissatisfied

DCA Auth;Exp. Jan. 31, 1990

17. If you dropped out of school in the past and then returned to school, why did you drop out? Check as many reasons as appropriate. If you have never dropped out of school go to question #18.

A. _____ Lack of interest
B. _____ Failing grades
C. _____ Dissatisfaction with teachers or principal
D. _____ Unhappy school experience
E. _____ Financial needs
F. _____ Medical/health problems
G. _____ Marriage
H. _____ Maternity (pregnancy)
I. _____ Armed Forces
J. _____ Did not feel welcome
K. _____ Family/personal reasons
L. _____ School wasn't going to help me get a job
M. _____ Working took too much time
N. _____ Drugs/Alcohol
O. _____ Problems with the police
P. _____ Someone from the school wanted me to leave
Q. _____ Don't Know
R. _____ Other (explain) _____

What was your MAIN reason for dropping out of school? _____
(Use letter from the above list.)

Why did you return to school? _____

_____

18. Who do you currently live with?

_____ Both of your parents _____ Your mother

_____ Your father _____ Someone else _____
(explain)

19. Is there an adult at home when you get home from school?

_____ Always _____ Sometimes _____ Never

_____ Usually _____ Rarely

20. Do your parents/guardian expect you to learn a lot in school?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Don't Know

DCA Auth;Exp. Jan. 31, 1990

21. Are you currently employed?

____ Yes ____ No

If yes; how many hours per week do you work? _____

22. What is your hourly salary? $_____

23. Do you have to work to help support your family?

____ Yes ____ No ____ Don't Know

24. What are your future educational plans?

____ Graduate from high school

____ None

____ Will enroll in a vocational or training school

____ Will drop out of school and take the high school diplomas equivalency exam

____ Will attend college some day

____ Don't know

____ Other (explain)_____

25. Did any of your brothers or sisters leave school before graduating?

____ Yes ____ No

26. How far did your FATHER go in school?

____ 8th grade or less

____ Some high school

____ Finished high school

____ Trade or business school

____ Some college

____ Graduated college

____ Other (explain)_____

DCA Auth;Exp. Jan.31, 1990

27. How far did your MOTHER go in school?

____ 8th grade or less

____ Some high school

____ Finished high school

____ Trade or business school

____ Some college

____ Graduated college

____ Other (explain)_____

28. What is the language most frequently spoken in your home?

____ English ____ Spanish ____ Both English and Spanish

____ Other (Explain)_____

29. Are you: ____ Male ____ Female

30. How would you best describe yourself?

____ White, Non-Hispanic ____ American/Alaskan Native

____ Black, Non-Hispanic ____ Asian/Pacific Islander

____ Hispanic

31. What grade are your currently in?

____ 7th grade

____ 8th grade

____ 9th grade

____ 10th grade

____ 11th grade

____ 12th grade

THANK YOU FOR THE TIME DEVOTED TO COMPLETING THIS SURVEY

DCA Auth;Exp.Jan. 31,1990

DIVISION OF PLANNING, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

M E M O R A N D U M

December 5, 1989
VLR/#160/1989-90

TO: Principals of Selected Secondary Schools

FROM: Virginia L. Rosen, Executive Director
Division of Planning, Assessment and Accountability

SUBJECT: DISTRIBUTION OF THE STUDENT BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

Attached please find three packets containing the Student Background and Attitude Survey. As part of a study to determine the background and attitudinal factors which differentiate "at-risk", dropout, and "normal" student populations, we are requesting that three secondary teachers of "middle level" language arts classes at your school administer the above referenced survey.

The survey contains items concerning students' attitudes toward various aspects of school life, expectations, future aspirations and home background. The survey generally deals with those areas that the educational research literature has identified as being correlated with "students at risk".

This survey should be administered in the specific course, sequence, and section number identified on the front of each envelope. Please distribute these packets at your earliest convenience to the teachers selected to participate.

We are hoping that the survey can be administered prior to the students leaving for the holiday recess. We have instructed the teachers to return the completed surveys on or before December 18, 1989.

If you have any questions regarding this request please do not hesitate to call Dale Romanik at 995-7470. Thank you very much for your assistance in this important research study.

Virginia L. Rosen

VLR/DR:cj
VLR-995-7503
Attachment

cc: Mr. Alex Bromir
Ms. Phyllis Cohen
Ms. Carol Cortes
Mr. Henry Goa
Mr. Eddie T. Pearson
Mr. Marvin Weiner

DIVISION OF PLANNING, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

M E M O R A N D U M

December 12, 1989
VLR/#159/1989-90

TO: Occupational/Placement Specialists

FROM: Roger Cuevas, Assistant Superintendent RCC
Office of Vocational, Adult, Career, & Community Education

Virginia L. Rosen, Executive Director VLR
Division of Planning, Assessment and Accountability

SUBJECT: INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE STUDENT BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

The Office of Vocational, Adult, Career, and Community Education and the Division of Planning, Assessment and Accountability are involved in a joint effort to survey "at-risk" students. We are requesting that you administer the above referenced survey to a randomly-selected sample of students listed on your roster of "at-risk" students. The purpose of the survey is to compare the attitudinal and background characteristics of "at-risk" students with those of dropouts and the "normal" student population.

Attached you will find specific instructions for the random selection of students from your "at-risk" roster. Please follow these directions carefully. You will also find suggestions for administering the survey which should be adhered to. You should gather the selected students together in one group and orient them before administering the survey. Be sure to read the survey yourself prior to the orientation/administration session.

If you have any questions about the intent of the survey or any of the procedures please call Dale Romanik at 995-7470. Please administer the survey during the week of January 2-5 and return completed surveys by January 10, 1990. For return, use the envelope provided and mail to #9023, Room 100, Attn: Dale Romanik.

VLR/DR:cj
VLR-995-7503
Attachment

cc: Mr. Frank DeVarona
Mr. Nelson Perez

DIRECTIONS FOR SELECTION OF STUDENTS FOR THE STUDENT BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

1) Select every fourth student on your "at-risk" roster/printout.

2) Given the average length of each school's roster (approximately 30), this should result in the selection of 7-8 students for survey administration.

3) In those cases where more than 30 students are listed on the roster/printout, select every nth student, where selection of the "n" gives you from 7 to 8 students. To find "n", divide the total number of students listed on the roster/printout by 7. As an example, in the case of a student list containing 35 names, application of this rule would result in the selection of every 5th student.

DIRECTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE SURVEY

1) Be sure that the student's name and ID# is provided at the top of each survey. Also check to see that the name of the school and location number also appear at the top of each survey.

2) If students have difficulty in understanding the meaning of a particular item or items, feel free to provide an explanation.

3) The survey is not timed (although we estimate that it should take no more than 20 minutes).

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY RESEARCH!

DPPA:VLR159.DR:cj
VLRMEMOS

APPENDIX C

"Regular" Student Sample Demographics
Compared to DCPS Student Population

Demographic Variable	Survey Sample (n=421) %	Student Population (n=121,312) * %	Difference %
Ethnicity:			
White, Non-Hispanic	18.7	19.9	-1.2
Black, Non-Hispanic	34.7	31.2	+3.5
Hispanic	44.5	47.5	-3.0
Other	2.2	0.4	+1.8
Gender:			
Male	48.0	51.8	-3.8
Female	52.0	48.2	+3.8
Grade:			
7th	20.7	17.6	+3.1
8th	13.8	17.3	-3.5
9th	17.1	18.9	-1.8
10th	17.3	18.2	-0.9
11th	18.3	15.5	+2.8
12th	12.8	12.5	+0.3

*

Source: Fall Student Survey for 1989-90; Division of Planning, Assessment and Accountability, October 1989. Includes grades 7 to 12 only.

"At-Risk" Sample Demographics Compared to DCPS "At-Risk" Population

Demographic Variable	Survey Sample (n=447) %	At-Risk Population (n=48,361) * %	Difference %
Ethnicity:			
White, Non-Hispanic	12.5	12.1	+0.4
Black, Non-Hispanic	39.4	39.0	+0.4
Hispanic	46.3	48.4	-2.1
Other	1.8	0.5	+1.3
Gender:			
Male	60.2	60.9	-0.7
Female	39.8	39.1	+0.7
Grade:			
7th	16.3	15.2	+1.1
8th	18.8	17.5	+1.3
9th	20.4	19.8	+0.6
10th	23.3	19.7	+3.6
11th	11.2	16.6	-5.4
12th	10.1	11.2	-1.1

* Source: Student Assistance Profile Summary; November, 1989. Includes grades 7 to 12 only.

The School Board of Dade County, Florida adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination in educational programs activities and employment and strives affirmatively to provide equal opportunity for all as required by:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended - prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

Age Discrimination Act of 1967, as amended - prohibits discrimination on the basis of age between 40 and 70.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - prohibits discrimination against the handicapped.

Florida Educational Equity Act - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, marital status or handicap against a student or employee.

Veterans are provided re-employment rights in accordance with P.L. 93–508 (Federal) and Section 296.07, Florida Statutes, which also stipulates categorical preferences for employment.